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REGISTRATION OF CAUSES OF DEATH.

Mr. John B. Martin, President of the Royal Statistical Society, England, in his annual address, delivered November 17, 1896, describes the method followed in Switzerland by the Federal Statistical Bureau, in order to secure accurate returns of the causes of death from the medical profession. It appears that —

In certain cantons the doctors took refuge behind the veil of professional secrecy and refused to state the cause of death. The registrar had, therefore, to be content with the declaration and verification of death which satisfied the schedule, and left the cause of death to be declared by the relations. It happened also that the doctor in attendance gave as the cause of death a secondary complaint, as, for instance, pneumonia, when this disease was the consequence of scarlet fever or nephritis, when the primary cause was scarlatina. In order to obviate these inconveniences the Statistical Bureau, in accord with the medical profession, instituted a new certificate of death. As soon as a death is declared to the civil authorities the officer fills up the first part of the new schedule and sends it with an envelope to the doctor who has signed the open declaration. The doctor, after having assured himself of the identity of the individual, tears off the counterfoil which bears the name of the deceased, and has only to answer questions in the second part of the schedule — that is to say, to indicate primary and secondary, or immediate cause of death, as well as all information useful for statistical purposes. Having done this he returns the card to the registrar, who is not at liberty to open the envelope, but must satisfy himself that the card is therein contained. Later on the sealed envelopes are sent to the officials of the Statistical Bureau, by whom they are sorted and arranged. In this way medical confidence is safeguarded and exact returns are obtained. In this manner the series of the death returns have attained a high degree of accuracy, since they are based on confidential information given by doctors who are only actuated by the interests of medical and sanitary science.

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Eighth Report on the Custody and Condition of the Public Records of Parishes, Towns, and Counties of Massachusetts. Robert T. Swan, Commissioner. Boston, 1896. Pp. 42.

The history of the bill relating to the returning and recording of births, marriages, and deaths is again referred to, and a review is made of the agitation and legislation upon this subject in Massachu-